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The Nature of Dogrib Socioterritorial Groups

JUNE HELM

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The Nature of Dogrib Socioterritorial Groups

JUNE HELM

This is an attempt to characterize and categorize socioterritorial groups among the Athapaskan Dogrib Indians of the northwestern Canadian subarctic.[1] By socioterritorial, I specify those kinds of groups which conjoin settlement pattern with community pattern (Helm, in press a). That is, I am concerned both with "any form of human occupation . . . over a particular locale" or range (Chang, 1962), and with the nature of the social group constituted by the occupants of the locale or range.

The three kinds of socioterritorial groups which I identify among the Dogrib[2] I have termed the *regional band* (comparable to the "macrocosmic unit of social organization" identified by Honigmann [1946, p. 64] for the inland Northern Athapaskans), the *local band* (equivalent to Honigmann's "microcosmic unit"), and the *task group*.

Membership in these three kinds of socioterritorial entities is in no wise mutually exclusive. An individual may at the same time have social identity as a member of a regional band and of a local band, and, by the simple fact of his presence, also be a member of a task group. Segments of the local band and regional band operate as task groups (as defined below). These three kinds of groups, however, may be segregated analytically by time-and-space dimensions—namely, temporal duration and spatial (settlement) cohesion—and by three foci around which membership revolves.

The foci of membership identification and recruitment are (1) territorial range, (2) specific resources and resource locales within the range, and (3) kinship. I see the ecological-subsistence complex of range and resources conjoined with an ego-based kinship network as the basic forces in the creation and structuring of the three sorts of socioterritorial groups. Range, resources, and kinship not only affect, but *effect*, socioterritorial organization. Furthermore, each in turn serves as the prime focus of identity and affiliation for regional band, for

1. I present the discussion in terms of the Dogribs, on whom I have the most data. I have, however, drawn on material from neighboring Arctic Drainage Athapaskan peoples to build the broad characterization which I believe to be generally applicable to the Mackenzie Drainage Athapaskans or Dene. All data are, of course, postcontact. I deal with what I judge to be the more traditional social and demographic arrangements (not treating of the trading-for settlement, for example), but the extent to which these match truly aboriginal arrangements must always remain problematical. Some of the major postcontact shifts in exploitative and demographic patterns, such as increasing sedentarization, are discussed in Helm and Damas, 1963.

2. For the purposes of brevity, I shall ignore the difficult problem of what, if anything, constitutes a "tribe" in such a simple society as the Dogrib. I suggest that in structural terms the "tribe" may be defined as the greatest extension of population throughout which there is sufficient intermarriage to maintain many-sided social communication.

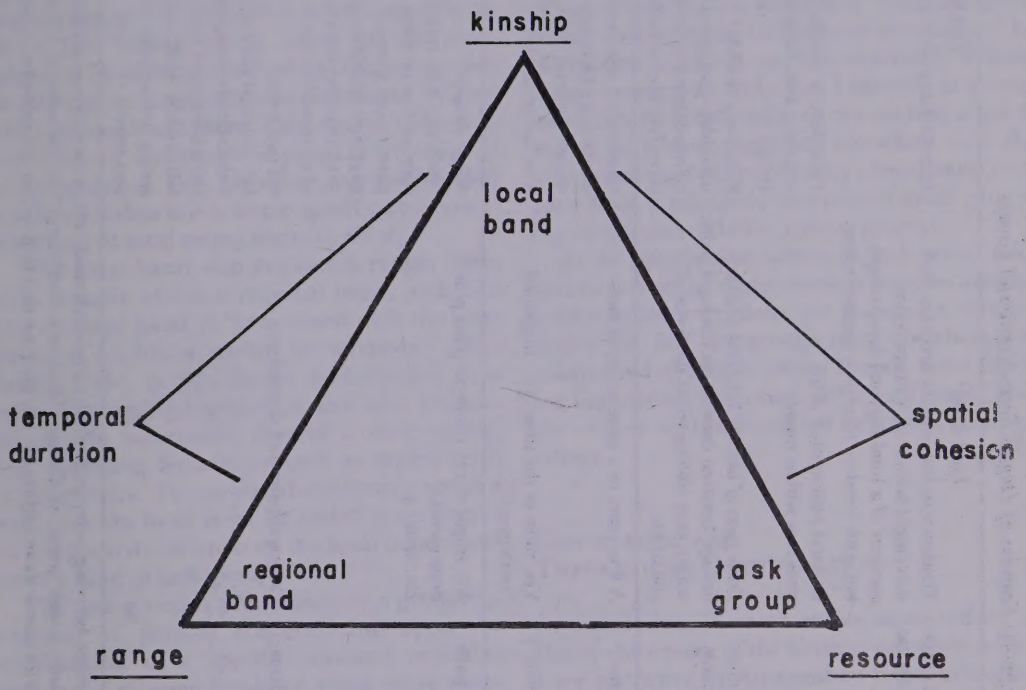

FIGURE 1.

the task group, and for the local band, respectively. For the regional band, the prime focus of identity is the territorial range; a task group forms in response to a specific and localized[3] resource; the strength of primary kin bonds holds the local band together in space and through time.

The varying weight of these three factors affects the temporal and spatial dimensions of the three kinds of socioterritorial groups.

The triangle diagram (Fig. 1) attempts a visual construction of the interplay of the specifying and discriminating features of regional bands, local bands, and task groups. The size of these kinds of socioterritorial groups is a function of the identity-affiliation factors and the time-space dimensions. Table 1 presents a chart of the main features differentiating the three kinds of groups.

In the persons exploiting the various and variable resources within a recognized range or territory, the regional band has its social identity as a "people." The total territory yields sufficient materials for the necessities of life (famine periods excepted) so that within its

3. In this paper, the usage of "local" and "localized" in regard to human groups and resources should not necessarily to taken to mean immobility. "Local" and "localized" here refer to the spatially compacted condition of the group (e.g., a local band) or of the resource (e.g., a caribou herd), whether the group or resource is "on the move" or not.

Table 1 Diagnostic Features of Dogrib Socio-Territorial Groups

		Regional Band	*Local Band*	*Task Group*
FOCI OF IDENTITY AND MEMBERSHIP	TERRITORIAL RANGE	*Prime focus of identity.* Total range as identified by tradition and use.	Tendency to concentrate activities and movement within own range (often segment of a total regional band range) but with freedom to exploit greater range.	Specific route and/or resource locale.
	RESOURCES	General exploitation of all resources within range.	General exploitation of all resources within range.	*Prime focus of identity.* Specific resource (caribou, fish, fur bearers, poitn-of-trade, etc.).
	KINSHIP	Bilateral primary consanguine linkage between conjugal pairs.	*Prime focus of identity.* Bilateral primary linkage between constituent conjugal pairs, with a core sibling set as the focus of affiliation.	Relatively flexible? Apparently involving friendship and special abilities as factors in recruitment as well as the kind of kinship directives operative in band membership.
TIME-SPACE DIMENSIONS	TEMPORAL DURATION	Several (many?) generations.	A few years to a generation or two.	Overnight* (e.g., moosehunt) to several weeks (e.g., linked-family winter trapping party).
	SPATIAL COHESION	No (i.e., scattered "settlement").	Yes, most of the time (i.e., nucleated "settlement").	Yes, by its nature.
ADDITIONAL FEATURES	SIZE (dependent variable of above features)	*Est. range:* 12–50 conjugal pairs plus dependents.	*Est. range:* 2–12† conjugal pairs plus dependents. *Est. mode:* 4	*Range variable.* *small size:* e.g., trapping party—2 or 3 men, or one or a few families; moosehunt party—2 or 3 men. *large size:* multifamily fishing camp—*est.* 5–15 families; fall caribou hunt—"crews" of c. 10 males each.
	CONSTITUENT UNITS	Conjugal pairs and dependents; local bands.	Conjugal pairs and dependents.	Of two sorts: (a) conjugal pairs and dependents (e.g., linked-family trapping party, fish camp); (b) able-bodied males (e.g., present-day fall caribou hunt, trapping partnership, spring beaver hunt, trading party, extinct war party).

* Overnight by definition. This excludes a women's daytime berrying party away from camp-settlement, one or two persons gathering firewood, tending rabbit snares or fish nets for a few hours, etc. In other words, a task group, as defined, involves a "settlement" in the sense of Campbell's definition: "A settlement is any place occupied by one or more individuals for one or more nights, for any purpose that falls within the ordinary, expected, and predictable round of activities for the society in question."

† It is my guess that more than fifty years ago, (before extensive cabin-building) composition was less stable and the size of local bands did not attain the

domain the regional band can endure as an identity for generations. (Table 2 presents documentation identifying and placing Dogrib regional bands.) Characteristically, the total constituency of the regional band is not physically together. The families that make up the regional band are most apt to all come together when operating as a task group exploiting a resource which allows large assembly, as at a fall fishing camp. Most of the time, physical co-presence and social communication is shifting, intermittent, and piecemeal. Within the regional band there is kin-connectedness in the form of a network of primary affinal and consanguineal ties between members.[4] But neither kinship nor a single specific resource is the focus of total group identity *per se*.

The local band also exploits a range, often as a subunit within a regional band, and, like the regional band, is "concerned with the total problem of living within its territory" (Slobodin, 1962, p. 75). But it is distinctive as a spatial grouping-together of kinsmen, characteristically structured around a core sibling set, including females as well as males, with their spouses. To nucleated-settlement pattern and core-kin focus must be added some degree of temporal duration to set the local band apart from a kind of task group.

The task group is pre-eminently a grouping-together of persons concentrating upon the exploitation of a specific seasonal resource, ordinarily at some locale or along some route within the total range of a regional band. Whether activities are coordinated and/or produce shared depend upon the particular purpose of the task group (Helm, 1965a). By definition, the task group lacks temporal duration beyond a few weeks. The social composition of the task group may either be based on the basic social building block, the family, composed of a conjugal pair with dependents, or it may be all male. It is apparent that kin linkages serve as a mechanism of affiliation in forming a task group, but there is also evidence that friendships and special aptitudes sometimes play a role.

Task groups vary in size and in sex-age composition, depending largely upon the nature of the resource which is the focus of task group creation. Today, two or three nuclear families (usually linked by sibling and/or parent-child ties) may join together for periods of two weeks to two months of trapping, combined with general subsistence activities. The distinction between such a seasonal, linked-family task group and what I identify as a local band can be made only on the sliding scale of duration. I have suggested elsewhere that the aboriginal equivalent of today's local band may have been a relatively short-lived small grouping of this sort (Helm, 1965a, p. 379).

At the appropriate season, a task group may also be formed of many nuclear families around a fishing locale or along the route of a caribou migration. But task groups need not always be constituted of family units. Today, most hunting expeditions, for example, are all male, with the women and children left behind in camp or village.

Conclusions and Theoretical Considerations

In conclusion, I must make some effort to clarify the nature of the kinship principle which I see operative in Athapaskan band affiliation —specifically, in post-nuptial band residence. I believe the same principle also to be, if not critical, significant in task-group assemblages.

From the Dogribs, as with other Mackenzie Drainage Athapaskans, it is impossible to elicit "rules" regarding preferential marriage or local or regional band endogamy or exogamy. So also, with post-nuptial residence, except for the traditional understanding that the young husband should "work for" (and thereby reside with or by) his father-in-law until the birth of the first child. Add to all this the fact that the people move around the land "visiting" and that occasionally some do not return from whence they came.

The results of a search for residential pattern in this seeming flux have been presented in an earlier paper (Helm, 1965a). From inspection of the kinship connections between conjugal

4. Analysis of one Dogrib regional band, the Marten Lake People, over a 50-year period reveals that every resident in three generational horizons had as fellow member of the band one or more primary consanguines (siblings and/or parents) or held the primary affinal tie of marriage to an already consanguineally linked member of the band (Helm, 1965a).

FIGURE 2. RANGES (APPROXIMATE) OF DOGRIB REGIONAL BANDS (AFTER PETITOT, 1891; OSGOOD, 1932, 1936; AND HELM, 1962 FIELD NOTES).

Some local band-hamlets are indicated by numerals (for identification, see Table 2). The eastern reaches of Band C, Edge-of-the-Woods People, are barren grounds, exploited only for brief seasonal caribou hunts (and, in the past, musk-ox hunts).

Table 2 Dogrib Regional Bands: Documentation over a 70-year period

(Regional Band designations are underlined. Local group designations are not complete, but are included when noted in the literature. Designations of local bands are not underlined.)

Petitot (1891)

(A) *Klin-tchanpe:* Flancs-de-Chien, Plats-Côtés-de-Chien proprement dits-Le long de la baie du Nord du grand lac des Esclaves.

(B) *Tsan-tpie-pottinè:* gens du lac Excrementiel—Autour du lac la Martre et le long de la riviere de même nom.

(C) *Tpa-kfwèlè-pottinè:* gens de l'Anus-de-l'Eau, gens du large—Au sudest du grand lac des Ours, et à la source du fleuve Copper-mine.

(D–E) *Ttsè-pottinè:* gens des Canots en écorce, gens du Lac—Autour des rivages méridionaux du grand lac des Ours.

Est. Total Pop.: 1864—Petitot (1884–85) records 788 Dogribs trading into Old Fort Rae, plus 47 in Forts Norman and Franklin area at Great Bear Lake. Total = 835.

Osgood (1932)

(A) *Band 1:* inhabits the country close to Rae. A subdivision . . . hunts in the country west of the N. arm of Great Slave Lake to within 75 miles of Mackenzie River.

(B) *Band 2:* inhabits the country around lac la Martre and lac Grandin . . .

(C) *Band 4:* lives east of band 3.

(D) *Band 3:* occupies the country on both sides of the canoe route between Great Slave Lake and McTavish Bay. It does not come closer to Great Bear lake than lake Clut, south of Conjuror bay.

(E) *Band 5:* emigrated from band 3. Has become disassociated, living in Satudene country and trading into Norman since 1914.

Oblate Census (1911); with number of family heads (f h)

(A)
(1) Les Pêches (11 f h)
(2) "Famille Bruno"—Rivière aux Saules, aux Fort (19 f h)
(3) Fond du Lac (23 f h)

(B) *Lac la Martre* (17 f h)

(C) *Camp Germain* (13 f h) [V.T.: main group of the Edge-of-the-Woods People.]
(6) Maisons de Befwo (4 f h);
(7) Kfwekat'inlin (5 f h);
(8) Camp Gallu (9 f h);
[Cabin sites en route to the "edge of the woods." V.T. remembers these as hamlets abandoned as a generation died.]

(D–E) *Le Lac d'Ours* Brigade Jeremie (19 r h)
Brigade du Chef du Lac d'Ours (12 f h) [The "Brigades" probably refer to the followers of two trading chiefs. V.T.'s memory of the affiliations of men listed in each brigade does not separate the two brigades into Bands D and E respectively. Several men listed under the Bear Lake Chief's brigade V.T. assigns to the *et'at'i*^{n} proper and vice versa. This probably reflects the shifting affiliations of families through time.]

Est. Total Pop.: 1911—Total of 132 family household units. At 1959 ratio of 6.24 persons per household unit, a total population estimate of 823 persons is arrived at. This estimate may be too high (before medical services).

[*continued*

Table 2 continued]

Vital Thomas, Dogrib *informant (1962*) plus other field data*

(A) *tagahot'i^{n}:* "Follow-the-Shore-People." People inhabiting the shore of the North Arm of Great Slave Lake between the settlements of Rae and Yellowknife.

(1) Many formerly lived at Trout Rock. Many have moved. Some are now at enotah, so known as enotahot'i^{n}.

(2) betcoko^{n}t'i^{n}: Fort People ("Big-Knife-House People.") Indians who stay at the Fort. "All the rest, couldn't say they are really Fort People, because sometimes they move out for hunting and fishing."

(3) kareli^{n}hot'i^{n}: The present Marion River Village. "They came there because of good fishing there and good shelter from the wind. And everybody followed the rivers, summer and winter."

(B) *tso^{n}tihot'i^{n}:* "Feces Lake People." Marten Lake People. Between 1925–52 there were two local band clusters, at (4) egak'i^{n}li^{n} and at (5) mi^{n}got'i^{n} (site of the "People of the Nets"). All have now settled around the government schoolhouse at the mi^{n}got'i^{n} site.

(C) *wekwitihot'i^{n}* (Snare Lake People), or *detsi^{n}lahot'i^{n}* ("Edge-of-the-Woods People"), or *xozihot'i^{n}* ("Barrens People"), "depending on where they go" Until 1962–63 these people had been for some years based in the Fort. About twenty families have since started a settlement at (9) Snare Lake. The site of (7) kwekateli^{n} is still occupied seasonally.

(D) *et'at'i^{n}:* "Next-to-Another-Tribe-People." Many frequented Faber Lake. Some now residing in bush hamlets at (10) Rae Lake and (11) Hislop Lake.

(E) *satihot'i^{n}:* "Bear Lake People," beyond the *et'at'i^{n}*, "mostly along the south side of Great Bear Lake." Recognized by V.T. as "mostly Dogribs." Now, a few descendants in the Rae area, most at Great Bear Lake trading into Fort Norman.

Est. Total Pop.: 1959—Government count (mimeo band rolls) of Dogribs (including those in Yellowknife) = 1,023, with 164 family-household (hu-wi-ch) units, yielding 6.24 persons per unit.

* During a return to the field in 1967, it was possible to check with Vital Thomas the summary compiled from the 1962 data. Several minor emendations based on the 1967 data have been incorporated here. Data on Dogrib peopulations presently near the town of Yellowknife and others formerly south of Yellowknife are not included.

pairs in a sample of Athapaskan bands, I adduce the covert directive of primary relative relationship serving as a determinate limit on local and regional band residence-affiliation of the conjugal pair after marriage. Almost without exception, no married pair is residing with a local band or within a regional band domain unless at least one spouse of that pair, male or female, had at time of entry a primary consanguine, of either sex, already resident within the band.

In practice, this bilateral primary linkage principle allows multiple residence alternatives for the conjugal pair. From the position of male Ego, for example, the man may marry *within* the local[5] and/or regional band where he resides with his parents. Or he may, after bride-service, bring an "alien" wife back to his band. Or he and his wife may, early or later in conjugal life, elect to live with the band where his wife's parents or one or more siblings are established. Or he and his wife may link into a band where his brother or sister, married to a member of that band, resides. In later years, the man and his wife may "join" the band where a married child resides. And so on.

I have recently begun to look at other hunting societies for which ethnologists have provided data on the kin-composition of actual

5. Requisite age, unmarried status and kinship distance of the co-resident female permitting. The small size and closely kin-linked composition of the local band usually forces a man to look for a bride beyond his local band.

local groupings, short-lived or long-lived.[6] I find that Professor Lévi-Strauss' (1940) fluctuating Nambikwara bands (*a* 1 and *b* 1) display primary bilateral linkage by conjugal unit around a sibling set with a brother-leader, comparable to the Northern Athapaskan local band. The pattern of kin-composition of a sample of !Kung Bushman bands (Marshall 1960, pp. 323–33) is indistinguishable from that of Athapaskan local bands, as is Marshall's description of the chain-like residential linkage through bilateral primary ties (pp. 344–45). From Australia, the information provided by McCarthy and McArthur (1960) on the kin-composition of two Arnhem Land task groups reveals bilateral linkages between constituent conjugal pairs (with the result that men of different "country," totem, and moiety are in co-residence). Hiatt has recently specified a number of Australian aborigine societies in which the "usual common residence groups," as constrasted with the patri-line land-owning units, were composed of men of several patrilineal descent groups and in which the "small food-seeking units [task groups] commonly contained agnatic kinsmen" (1962, p. 285). In terms of who is actually "in community" with whom—for example, brother-in-law with brother-in-law rather than brother with brother—the picture of *de facto* residence association and economic interaction is quite different from that to be deduced from attributions of *de jure* patrilocality.

From these few cases alone, I submit that, for full comprehension of the economic and social dynamics of hunting societies and for cross-societal comparisons, the empirical patterns of post-nuptial co-residence, stable or shifting, demand as much attention as do formal "rules" of kin alliance and residence assignment.

6. I am indebted to Beryl C. Gillespie for her search for cases in the literature.

"The Nature of Dogrib Socioterritorial Groups," by June Helm. In Man the Hunter, R. Lee and I. Devore, eds. 1960. Pp. 118-125.

CORRIGENDA IN TABLE 2: Dogrib Regional Bands (pp. 123-124).

The publisher's editor did not fully follow corrected copy for this table. Error #1 is especially serious.

ERROR #1: Local Group (3) is entered under the wrong Regional Band in both the OBLATE CENSUS and the VITAL THOMAS, DOGRIB INFORMANT sections.

In OBLATE CENSUS (p. 123), the entry (3) Fond du Lac (23 fh) should be at the end of the section (D-E) Le Lac d'Ours [not under (A)].

In VITAL THOMAS (p. 124), the entry (3) kareli^{n}hot'i^{n}: The present Marian River Village . . . etc. should be at the end of section (D) et'at'i^{n}: Next-to-Another-Tribe-People . . . etc. [not under (A) tagahot'i^{n}].

In other words, Local Group (3) Fond du Lac and/or kareli^{n}hot'i^{n}, is a hamlet at the southern end of the et'at'i^{n} "road," and its members are of the et'at'i^{n} regional group. The regional band provenience of Local Group (3) is correctly shown in the map, Figure 2.

ERROR #2: Under OBLATE CENSUS, (D-E) Le Lac d'Ours (p. 123). The format obscures the fact that the Oblate Census listed two "brigades" under Le Lac d'Ours entry, namely: a) Brigade Jeremie
b) Brigade du Chef du Lac d'Ours

ERRATA: p. 118, footnote 1, ninth line:
for trading-for settlement
read trading-fort settlement

p. 119, footnote 3, third line:
for necessarily to taken to mean
read necessarily be taken to mean

p. 123, parenthesized entry immediately under Table 2 heading: for underlined
read italicized

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